



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Driven to DiscoverSM

Julia Alvarez

Biography

In 1960, at the age of ten, Julia Alvarez arrived in the United States from the Dominican Republic. Uprooted from her native country, culture, and language, Alvarez began writing and made language her homeland. Even as a child, she had a passion for listening to stories. As an immigrant, books provided a world for her in which she did not feel isolated. Although coming from a traditional family where she received no encouragement to pursue a career and was expected to become a housewife, Alvarez's love of words won over. Alvarez claims that being in the United States where she was surrounded by books, and where women were encouraged to discover their talents, contributed to her becoming an author. By the time she was in high school, she knew that she wanted to be a writer.

In college, Alvarez studied literature and writing, and in 1971 she graduated summa cum laude from Middlebury College. In describing her college experience, she says: "When I went to college, we read a little Jane Austen and Emily Dickinson. Like that was really going to help me, a Latina woman. . . . I thought I had to write like them in order to be a writer in English. I didn't know you could put 'amorcito' in a story in English." In 1975 Alvarez received an MA in Creative Writing from Syracuse University. Since then, she has taught literature and writing in schools at all levels, and she is currently a tenured professor at Middlebury College. During this time, Alvarez has also been a prolific writer. In 1984, *Homecoming*, a book of poems, was published.



Quick Facts

- * Born in 1950
- * Works center on Latina/o culture and themes
- * Spent much of her early childhood in the Dominican Republic

This page was researched and submitted by Neda Atanasoski on 4/15/98 and edited and updated by Lauren Curtright on 8/6/04.



Julia Alvarez

Biography continued

Although poetry was her first love, Alvarez moved on to write prose. In 1990 she published *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. This remains her most recognized novel, for which she won the PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Award. It tells of the experience of the four Garcia sisters, who, like Alvarez, came to New York City from the Dominican Republic. In fifteen interconnected stories, Alvarez tells of the girls struggle to find their place somewhere in-between the two distinct cultures to which they belong -- that of the American mainstream and of the country from which they came.

In 1994, Alvarez published *In the Time of the Butterflies*, an American Library Association Notable Book and a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist. In this historical novel, she introduces the American public to the legendary Mirabal sisters who gave their lives defying the oppressive dictatorship that was in place in the Dominican Republic. They were called “Las Mariposas” (The Butterflies). Alvarez went on to publish a second collection of poetry in 1995, *The Other Side: El Otro Lado*. In her novel *Yo!*, published in 1997, Alvarez revisits the Garcia sisters, and in the form of short stories gives voice to those who have been affected by Yolanda Garcia -- Yo for short. Alvarez was up to the challenge of writing from a perspective that was not Latina and not female; she says, “As Flaubert said, ‘Madame Bovary, c’est moi!’ We do become our characters: male, female; old, young; Anglo, Latina. But it might just be that the imaginative challenge is greater when we have to cross that autobiographical line and become the opposite gender.”

Alvarez’s essays, stories, and poems have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Allure*, *The New Yorker*, *Hispanic Magazine*, and *USA Weekend*. Since 1995, Alvarez has published more works of fiction and a collection of essays. And, after almost a decade of publishing strictly prose, she came out with another book of poetry, *The Woman I Kept to Myself*, in 2004. Alvarez has also authored childrens books, including *How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay* and *The Secret Footprints*. Her work has been translated into four languages, in addition to Spanish, and has been studied by many contemporary writers and literary critics.



Julia Alvarez

Biography continued

In a convocation speech delivered at Appalachian State University entitled “On Becoming a Butterfly,” Alvarez says, “I believe stories have this power -- they enter us, they transport us, they change things inside us, so invisibly, so minutely, that sometimes we’re not even aware that we come out of a great book as a different person from the person we were when we began reading it.” While acknowledging this responsibility to her readership, Alvarez also uses storytelling as a tool to give voice to her experience as a woman of two cultures and a woman of color. Nonetheless, she doesn’t believe that her writing is targeted to only one population, and she feels constrained when people label her as a writer for Latinos. Her main goal in writing is to make meaning through the telling of stories and to “remind us.”

Selected Bibliography

Works by the author

- The Woman I Kept to Myself: Poems* (Algonquin Books, 2004).
- Before We Were Free* (Knopf Book for Young Readers, 2002).
- A Cafecito Story* (Chelsea Green Publishers, 2001).
- In the Name of Salome* (Algonquin Books, 2000).
- The Secret Footprints* (Knopf Book for Young Readers, 2000).
- Something to Declare : Essays* (Algonquin Books, 1998).
- ¡Yo!* (Algonquin Books, 1997).
- Homecoming: New and Collected Poems* (Plume, 1996).
- The Other Side: El Otro Lado* (Dutton, 1996).
- In the Time of the Butterflies* (Algonquin Books, 1994).
- How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents* (Algonquin Books, 1990).
- Homecoming* (Grove Press, 1984).



Julia Alvarez

Selected Bibliography continued

Works about the author in English

- "Interview with Julia Alvarez" (*Latina Magazine*, 2004).
- "Beyond Words" (*bookWOMEN*, 2002).
- "Julia Alvarez: Stories of Two Worlds" (*Americas*, 2001).
- Asch, Kim. "Two Homes: One Heart: Fiction Form the Bridge Between Home and Heart" (*Middlebury Magazine*, 2000).
- Garca Tabor, Mara and Silvio Sirias, "The Truth According to Your Characters: An Interview with Julia Alvarez" (*Prairie Schooner*, 2000).
- Jones, Vanessa E. "Writing Her Book Of High Grace: Novelist/Poet Julia Alvarez Has Forged A Career Doing The Unexpected" (*Boston Globe*, 2000).
- Heredia, Juanita and Bridget A. Kevane, eds. *Latina Self Portraits: Interviews With Contemporary Women Writers* (University of New Mexico Press, 2000).
- Brown, Isabel Zakrewski. "Historiographic Metafiction in *In the Time of the Butterflies*" (*South Atlantic Review*, 1999).
- Chasar, Mark and Constance Pierce. "Interview with Julia Alvarez" (Glimmer Train, 1998).
- "Singing Makes Everything Else Possible" (*River Styx*, 1998).
- Luis, William. "A Search for Identity in Julia Alvarez's *How the Garca Girls Lost Their Accents*," in *Dance Between Two Cultures: Latino Caribbean Literature Written in the United States* (Vanderbilt University Press, 1997).
- Rosario-Sievert, Heather. "Anxiety, Repression, and Return: The Language of Julia Alvarez" (*Readerly/Writerly Texts: Essays on Literature, Literary/Textual Criticism, and Pedagogy*, 1997).
- Ortiz-Marquez, Maribel. "From Third World Politics to First World Practices: Contemporary Latina Writers in the United States," in *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*, eds. Bishnupriya Ghosh and Brinda Bose (Garland, 1997).
- Rosario-Sievert, Heather. "Conversation with Julia Alvarez" (*Review: Latin American Literature and Arts*, 1997).
- Bing, Jonathan. "Julia Alvarez: Books that Cross Borders" (*Publishers Weeks*, 1996).
- Muratori, Fred. "Traditional Form and the Living, Breathing American Poet" (*New England Review and Bread Loaf Quarterly*, 1986).



Julia Alvarez

Selected Bibliography continued

Works about the author in languages other than English

- "La mesa está servida para todos cuando escribo un libro," in *Ellas hablan de la Isla*, edited by Vitalina Alfonsos (Ediciones UNION, 2002).
- Gonzalez, Daniuska. "En el tiempo de las mariposas, de Julia Alvarez: escribiendo el espacio de lo femenino" (Osamayor, 2000).
- Holguin, Fernando Valerio. "En el tiempo de las mariposas de Julia Alvarez: una reinterpretación de la historia" (*Chasqui: revista de literatura latinoamericana*, 1998).
- Daroqui, Maria Julia. "Memorias de Mariposas," in *(Dis)locaciones: Narrativas híbridas del Caribe hispano* (Estudios Iberoamericanos, Universitat de Valencia, 1998).
- "Entrevista a Julia Alvarez" por Sophie Martinez (*Vetas*, 1997).
- Luis, William. "El desplazamiento de los orígenes en la narrativa caribeña de Reinaldo Arenas, Luis Rafael Sánchez y Julia Alvarez" (*La Torre*).
- Cocco de Filippis, Daisy. "Homecoming, Julia Alvarez y la búsqueda de una definición del ser hispana y mujer" (*Revista de Cultura*, 1990).
- Cocco de Filippis, Daisy. "Entre dominicanos: Una lectura de 'Las Cuatro Niñas'" (Centro 1989-1990).
- Candelier, Bruno Rosario. "Carta a una poeta en New York" (*Coloquio*, 1989).
- Umpierre, Luz Maria. "Sexualidad y Metapoesía: Cuatro Poemas de Julia Alvarez" (*Cuadernos De Poética*, 1988).



Julia Alvarez

Works in languages other than English

Yo!, trans. Martine Laroche (Éditions Métailié, 2002).

Au Temps des Papillons, trans. Daniel Lemoine (Éditions Métailié, 1997).

Comment les Filles García ont Perdu leur Accent, trans. Yvan Comeau (Flammarion, 1993).

Nel Nome di Salomé, trans. Guido Zurlino (Marco Tropea Editore, 2002).

K'op`i iyagi (A Cafecito Story), trans. Un-gyong Song (Namu Simnun Saram, 2003).

No Tempo das Borboletas, trans. La Viveiros de Castro (Bertrand Editora, 1999).

Cuando Ta Lola Vino de Visita a Quedarse, trans. Liliana Valenzuela (Dell Yearling, 2004).

Antes de Ser Libres, trans. Liliana Valenzuela (Dell Laurel-Leaf, 2004).

Las Huellas Secretas. Illustrations by Fabian Negrin, trans. Dolores Prida (Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

En el Nombre de Salomé, trans. Dolores Prida (Thorndike Press, 2002).

A Cafecito Story/El cuento del cafecito, with Bill Eichner, M.D. , Belkis Ramirez, and Daisy Cocco de Filippis (Chelsea Green Publishers, 2002).

Yo!, trans. Dolores Prida (Plume, 1999).

En el Tiempo de las Mariposas: Novella, trans. Rolando Costa Picazo (Plume, 1998).

De Cómo las Chicas García Perdieron su Acento, trans. Jordi Gubern (Ediciones B, 1994).